
COACHING FOR BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

Marshall Goldsmith

As leaders, we preach teamwork, but often excuse ourselves from its practice—and even more often fail to hold people in our organizations accountable for demonstrating the behavior associated with living this value (Goldsmith, 1996). If everyone, including senior executives, acknowledges this challenge, why is it so difficult for leaders to promote change among those whose behavior they can most readily influence—their direct reports?

One reason is that leaders, like most people, want to be liked. Leaders are often afraid that confronting people about poor teamwork or other behavioral shortcomings (as opposed to performance problems) will cause them to be disliked. The paradox is, leaders would be respected *more*, not less, for delivering the bad news. Outside consultants often provide behavioral coaching to leaders, and leaders usually appreciate the help. Surveys show that people highly value honest feedback—whether or not the feedback itself is positive.

The nature of the performance-review process itself accounts for much of the problem. Historically, when assessing others, most managers were forced to play the role of judge—and, potentially, executioner. The consultant, by contrast, is usually seen as an objective third party who is providing analysis, suggestions, and feedback gathered from multiple sources. A person receiving bad news from a consultant is more likely to separate the message from the messenger than a person hearing the same news from the manager.

Fortunately, leaders have at their disposal a valuable aid already in place at many leading companies—360° feedback. Carefully designed processes that include 360° feedback can allow a leader to practice consultative behavioral coaching, as opposed to merely exercising personal judgment. The results can be profound—and not just for department heads evaluating their front-line employees. The executive coaching process can help any manager whose work involves personal interaction. In fact, senior management teams at some of the world's leading companies—American Express, Avon, GE, Netscape, Nortel, and Texaco—use 360° feedback as part of an overall process to help align corporate values and individual behavior.

Before You Begin

Although this process can improve behavior, it will definitely not solve all performance problems. The behavioral coaching process described in this chapter will focus only on coaching for behavioral change, not on strategic coaching, career coaching, or any of the other types of coaching described in this book. Before you start, ask yourself whether any of the following conditions prevail. If so, behavioral coaching may be a waste of time.

- *The person you're coaching is not willing to make a sincere effort to change.* Behavioral coaching will only work if the manager you are coaching is willing to make the needed commitment.
- *The person has been written off by the company.* Sometimes, organizations are really just documenting a case to get rid of someone. If that's the case, don't bother going through this process.
- *The person lacks the intelligence or functional skills to do the job.* If a manager does not have the capacity or experience required, don't expect behavioral coaching to help.
- *The organization has the wrong mission.* Behavioral coaching is a "how to get there" process, not a "where to go" process. If the organization is headed in the wrong direction, behavioral coaching will not make it change course.

Getting Started

On the other hand, if you're dealing with people who have the will and capacity to change their behavior, are operating in an environment that gives them a chance to change, and work for an organization that is headed in the right direction, this process will work; the nature of the process itself assures its success. The approach I recommend involves eight steps:

1. *Identify attributes for the manager you are coaching.* You should not have to start from scratch. I generally work with my clients to develop custom leadership profiles, but there are many useful inventories on the market (from Accenture's Global Leader of the Future, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, the Center for Creative Leadership, and others) that can be a big help. Once you've determined the behavioral characteristics of a successful manager in a given position—such things as accessibility to colleagues, recognition of others, and listening—ask that manager if he or she agrees that these are the right kinds of behaviors. Securing agreement will boost commitment to the process.
2. *Determine who can provide meaningful feedback.* Key stakeholders may include direct reports, peers, customers, suppliers, or members of the management team. Strive for a balanced mix that does not stack the deck for or against the manager, and gain agreement that these are the appropriate reviewers.
3. *Collect feedback.* Assessment is often best handled in a written, anonymous survey, compiled by an outside party into a summary report and given directly to the manager being coached.
4. *Analyze results.* Talk with the manager about the results of his or her peers' feedback. The manager may choose not to disclose individual stakeholders' comments or numerical scores. The point is simply to discuss the manager's key strengths and areas for improvement.
5. *Develop an action plan.* The most helpful—and appreciated—outcome of any assessment is specific advice. Developing "alternatives to consider" (rather than mandates) should not be difficult. If, for example, you asked the manager to suggest things you could do to be a better listener, you would probably receive a pretty good list, such as:
 - Don't interrupt people;

- Paraphrase what they say;
 - Make eye contact;
 - Pause five seconds before responding to their remarks;
 - Recognize that the problem isn't figuring out what to do; the problem is doing it; and
 - Focus on one or two key behaviors and develop a few action steps to improve each.
6. *Have the manager respond to stakeholders.* The manager being reviewed should talk with each member of the review team and collect additional suggestions on how to improve on the key areas targeted for improvement.
 7. *Develop an ongoing follow-up process.* Within three or four months conduct a two- to six-item mini-survey with the original review team. Respondents should be asked whether the manager has become more or less effective in the areas targeted for improvement.
 8. *Review results and start again.* If the manager has taken the process seriously, stakeholders almost invariably report improvement. Build on that success by repeating the process quarterly for the next twelve to eighteen months. This type of follow-up will assure continued progress on initial goals and uncover additional areas for improvement. Stakeholders will appreciate the follow-up—people don't mind filling out a focused, two- to six-item mini-survey when they see positive results. The manager will benefit from ongoing, targeted feedback to improve performance.

Moving Beyond the Basics

You may want some coaching yourself from a trusted colleague, friend, or family member on how to approach the task, but this is not a mysterious process. It requires more discipline than talent, more integrity and commitment than behavioral science expertise. Simply by sitting down with the manager and analyzing perceptions of his or her colleagues, you will be able to change your relationship with that person. And the person will change too. Managers who want to improve, talk to people about ways to improve, solicit feedback, and develop a rigorous follow-up plan will almost always improve. (Certainly they won't get worse.) And when people improve, their self-confidence goes up. They keep doing what works, and they keep getting better.

By becoming an effective coach, you can become a more credible leader and an active agent of change. You help people develop an essential habit for personal or organizational success—follow-through. By delivering what you promise—that is, measuring others on the behaviors and attributes you say you value—you cement the bonds of leadership with your constituents. And by having others follow through on their own progress toward agreed-on goals, you can help create a more responsive, positive, and cohesive organization.

It may be difficult for leaders to give and receive honest feedback—and to make the time for genuine dialogue. Behavioral coaching is simple, but not easy. It is just one tool in a total strategy of performance appraisal, compensation, and promotion that can reinforce positive behavioral change. But, if you're serious about your espoused values, shouldn't you ensure that the managers in your organization demonstrate the behaviors you promote?

About the Contributor

Marshall Goldsmith is one of the world's foremost authorities on helping leaders achieve positive, measurable change in behavior for themselves, their people, and their teams. In 2000, Marshall was listed in *Forbes* magazine as one of five top executive coaches and in *Human Resources* magazine as one of the world's leading human resource consultants. He has also been ranked in the *Wall Street Journal* as one of the top ten consultants in the field of executive development. His work has received national recognition from the Institute for Management Studies, the American Management Association, the American Society for Training and Development, and the Human Resource Planning Society.

Marshall's coaching process has been positively described in both the *New York Times* and the *Financial Times* (U.K.). He is one of a select few consultants who has been asked to provide leadership development or coaching to over fifty of the world's leading CEOs. Marshall's work is focused specifically on coaching for behavioral change.

Twenty years ago, Marshall co-founded Keilty Goldsmith & Company (KGC). A recent study by Penn State University listed KGC as one of seven key providers of customized leadership development in the U.S. KGC's coaching, leadership development, and feedback processes have impacted over one million people in seventy organizations around the world. KGC consultants have a unique approach to behavioral coaching. They typically are not paid for one year; and they are not paid unless positive, measurable change in behavior occurs. In the process, behavioral change is not measured by the person being coached, but by the key stakeholders of their coaching client.

Clients have included many of the world's leading corporations, such as Agilent, American Express, Andersen Consulting, AT&T, BellSouth Coca-Cola, Dow Chemical, Enron, Goldman-Sachs, General Electric, GTE, John Hancock, IBM, Johnson & Johnson, Kodak, KPMG, Luce McKinsey, Merck, Motorola, Nortel, Northrop Grumman, Pfizer, Pitney Bowes, SmithKline Beecham, Southern Company, Square D, Sun Microsystems, Texaco, Thomson Corporation, Titleist, UBS, Union Pacific, Warner-Lambert, and Weyerhaeuser.

Marshall has an MBA from Indiana University and a Ph.D. from UCLA. In the past year, he has taught in executive education programs both Dartmouth and Cambridge Universities.

Marshall co-edited (with Frances Hesselbein and Dick Beckhard) books, *The Leader of the Future* (a *Business Week* "Top 15" bestseller), *The Organization of the Future*, and *The Community of the Future* (ranked number one in its field by Amazon.com), which have sold over 600,000 copies in fourteen languages. He has also co-edited the recently released books *Leading Beyond the Walls*, *Learning Journeys*, *Leaders Are Our Most Important Product*, *Linkage's Best Practices in Leadership Development*.

Marshall is a member of the PROVANT advisory board and a member of the board of the Peter Drucker Foundation. "Coaching for Behavioral Change" is an adaptation of one of the many articles that he written for the Foundation's journal *Leader to Leader*.

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